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Benchmark Survey

SDSU Extension

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Benchmark Survey



Overview

In 2011, SDSU Extension faced significant state and federal budget cuts (FY2012), which meant the concept of a traditional Extension system would not be financially feasible. In response to these cuts, SDSU Extension implemented a new staffing model, reorganized into eight Regional Extension Centers and emphasized a web-based delivery system through www.iGrow.org.

How did these changes impact SDSU Extension's ability to support its land-grant mission to provide educational programs that strengthen agriculture and natural resources, families and communities? To find out, SDSU Extension contracted with a third-party marketing firm to interview 400 crop and livestock producers throughout South Dakota.

The objective of this study was to gauge current perceptions of SDSU Extension and its position in the current agriculture marketplace. Throughout this process, SDSU Extension will be able to identify new opportunities, plan future initiatives and deliver programs and services where they are needed most.



Methodology

The survey was designed by Paulsen Marketing, Sioux Falls, S.D., and implemented by Central Surveys, Inc., Shenandoah, Iowa. Respondents were selected from a qualified database of 10,000 South Dakota crop and cattle producers. Interviewers had contact with approximately 3,900 heads of households to complete 400 total telephone interviews. The average interview length was 21 minutes. The margin of error is calculated at the 95 percent confidence level.



Successful producers are a key audience segment for SDSU Extension

South Dakota's most successful producers have something in common: they have a strong connection to 4-H, they are college educated and they have a gross farm income of over \$250,000. These are the producers who are most aware of SDSU Extension services and who are most likely to seek information from a SDSU Extension specialist. They are also the producers who are most likely to pay for relevant information and services. However, this same audience segment also has a higher expectation for performance across all SDSU Extension services. Delivering upon this expectation is essential to SDSU Extension's future success.



Trustworthiness

SDSU Extension receives high ratings for being a trustworthy source of research and recommendations, providing the most unbiased information and being a leader in agriculture science, and for being a relevant source of expertise. However, SDSU Extension receives relatively lower ratings for being responsive to the market and for being first to introduce new information. Taken as a whole, SDSU Extension's greatest brand attribute is "trustworthiness" and will be key to developing future programs and initiatives.



Do the following statements accurately describe SDSU Extension?

7-point scale; 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree

	Mean
Extension is a trustworthy source for research and recommendations	5.67
Extension provides the most unbiased information	5.51
Extension is a leader in agricultural science	5.44
Extension is a relevant source of expertise	5.40
Extension provides the most valuable information	5.14
Extension provides the most advanced tools and technology	5.14
Extension provides the most innovative information	5.04
Extension is usually responsive to the market	4.83
Extension is usually first to introduce new information	4.72

How trustworthy are these sources of information?

7-point scale; 1 = not at all trustworthy and 7 = extremely trustworthy

	Mean
Veterinarian	6.20
SDSU Extension	5.50
Agronomist	5.46
Nutritionists	5.14
Friends and neighbors	5.13
Local cooperative	5.11
Seed rep	4.94
Commodity associations	4.40
Ag news media	4.37

Programs & Services

SDSU Extension is best known for its involvement with 4-H and youth development programs. Producers carry this connective experience throughout their careers as farmers and ranchers. For example, 4-H families are more likely than non-4-H families to be aware of, and use, SDSU Extension services.

Top 10
responses,
unaided:

When you think of SDSU Extension, what programs or services come to mind?

4-H, youth programs	23%
Crop, seed genetics, R&D	18%
Livestock, animal science	15%
Weed control, management information	15%
Certification/training for chemicals, pesticides	12%
Experimental research farms, test plots, trials	7%
Agronomy	6%
Animal nutrition, feed quality, testing	6%
Soil testing, analysis	5%
Seminars, classes, clinics, CE	5%

Awareness & Usage

Respondents have high awareness of programs and services offered by SDSU Extension and usage of those services increases based on education, income and age. The likelihood of using SDSU Extension programs and services tends to increase with the level of education. Producers with a gross farm income over \$250K consistently use SDSU Extension services more than other producers. Not surprisingly, respondents age 18-49 are significantly more likely than older respondents to have used the iGrow website, webinars and mobile apps.

Awareness and usage of SDSU Extension program or services.

	Awareness	Usage
Events, fairs, trade shows, seminars	79%	63%
Livestock/agronomy education programs	77%	40%
Weather services	54%	20%
iGrow website	41%	20%
Best management practices manual	34%	12%
Webinars	26%	5%
Mobile apps	20%	2%

Value

Producers who have used SDSU Extension programs and services place a high value on their experience. Farmers with 4+ years of college are almost twice as likely to pay for information and services. The likelihood of paying for information and services also increases with gross farm income. Producers who have sought information from SDSU Extension are three times as likely to have paid for information from other sources—compared to those who have never sought information from SDSU Extension.

Producers who have used SDSU Extension programs & services consider them valuable.

7-point scale; 1 = not at all valuable and 7 = extremely valuable

	Mean
Best management practice manual	5.83
Webinars	5.76
Livestock/agronomy education	5.69
SDSU Extension events	5.62
Weather services	5.53
iGrow website	5.20
Mobile apps	5.00

Future Needs

The most-needed types of information to be a competitive producer in the future include information about chemical/pesticide usage, seed hybrids/genetics, marketing and exports, and best practices for managing input costs and increasing profits. Younger producers see a significantly greater need for marketing information. Producers with 4+ years of college see a significantly greater need for seed information. Crop-only producers see a significantly greater need for agronomic information. Overall, there is a growing demand for science-based knowledge that can help increase productivity, profitability and global competitiveness.

What information will you need to be a competitive producer in the future?

Chemical, herbicide, pesticide usage and control	17%
Seed hybrids, genetics, development and selection	15%
Marketing, exports, free trade, market factors	13%
Best practices, managing inputs, increasing profitability	10%
Nutrition, feed supplements, feed costs	10%
Livestock, genetics, breeding	7%
Livestock diseases, animal health, vaccinations	6%
Fertilizer usage, cost control	5%
Equipment, machinery, precision ag, GPS	5%
Work with agronomist to optimize production, yield	4%

Summary

Today, farmers and ranchers have unprecedented access to information and expertise, but there is little context or perspective. As the trusted source for unbiased science-based information, SDSU Extension is uniquely qualified to provide the insight producers need to make better decisions, become more productive and enjoy greater profitability. This is an advantageous market position that allows Extension to be a leader, an arbitrator, a mentor and a partner.

This benchmark study confirms that SDSU Extension has effectively adapted to changing budget realities without losing sight of its core mission — to provide educational programs that strengthen agriculture and natural resources, families and communities throughout South Dakota.



